MANURING

Watering is not enough; the soil needs nourishment to make it productive. The fellah knows only too well that the fertilising powers of the soil must be revived. Together with his wife and children he does his best to find, at as little expense as possible, as much animal or chemical manure as he can.

Pigeon droppings, silt cleaned out of canals and mixed with grass, and, above all, soil impregnated with stable-dung (*sebâkh bàladi*), (but never human excrement), village débris and age-old dust, all contribute nitrogen to his field. The rubbish mounds (*koms*) of dead cities become quarries to which the fellah turns for his manure. This *sebakh kufri*, as it is called, is found in varying qualities all over Egypt; but nowadays most of what is left is of poor quality.

In the cliffs of Upper Egypt there is also a kind of sand (*marog*) and a clay (*tafla*) which serve as a poor manure, and need much labour to bring to the fields. But all these manures are lacking in salt content. The used-up soil needs artificial remedies. Despite the fellah's hidebound methods his sympathy with the soil has helped him to understand its need. Since the early years of this century, good *sebâkh kufri* having become almost unobtainable, he has begun to use chemical manures (*semàd*). Before the present war (1939), Egypt used to import more than half a million tons of natural nitrates from Chile, the earliest known source, and synthetic nitrates from Germany and England. These may be used on all except leguminous crops (berseem, fenugreek, and beans), which need phosphates.

The distribution of *semàd* is most efficiently organised by the *Crédit Agricole d'Egypte*, which sells it by the sack on credit, and also by the Royal Agricultural Society and the big import firms. There are about 2,000 depots spread all over the country. The chief customers are the big landowners and the State Domains, which advance to the owners and tenant farmers the amount required for each holding against part of the crop. Before the war a sack of 100 kilograms, delivered to the village, used to cost from 65 to 70 piastres. Corn crops require the most expensive fertilisers, but the cheapest qualities are good enough for *berseem*.